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Prayer Services and Retreats for the Catechetical Year

Incluye servicios de oración en español

UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS • WASHINGTON, D.C.

In its planning document, as approved by the general membership of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in November 2003, the Department of Education was authorized to continue its Catechetical Sunday observance book. This present document, *Prayer Services and Retreats for the Catechetical Year*, was approved by the chairman of the Committee on Catechesis, Most Rev. Daniel M. Buechlein, and authorized for publication by the undersigned.

Monsignor William P. Fay
General Secretary
USCCB

Contributors to USCCB resources related to Catechetical Sunday 2004—which are available in this booklet, *Prayer Services and Retreats for the Catechetical Year*, in the two related booklets, *Celebrating Catechetical Sunday 2004* and *Resources for Catholic School Teachers*, and on the USCCB website—include the following: Kathleen Hendricks (general editor; writer of planning materials, prayers, theme explanation, and catechetical leader resources), Christopher L. Weber (assistant general editor; writer for liturgy and planning materials, Car Chats, and catechetical leader resources), Luis Zuniga (editor for Spanish resources), Kirk Gaddy (writer of resources for Catholic school principals and related to Catholic Schools Week), Kathy Gallo, SCN (writer of seasonal retreats), Camille Liscinsky (writer of prayer services), Mary Merkle-Scotland (writer of prayer services), Barbara Radtke (writer of Scripture exegesis and pastoral reflection), Don Schneider (writer of parish bulletin inserts), Joyce Solimini (writer of plan for parent meeting and retreat related to Catechetical Sunday 2004 theme), Marguerite Broderick, DC (writer of prayer services in Spanish), and Fanny Pedraza (Spanish translator of resources for celebrating Catechetical Sunday).

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Contents

Welcoming Meeting for Parents and Children: Stewards of God's Gifts • 4

Catechists' Prayer Service for Opening of Program Year: Stewards of God's Gifts • 6

Catechists' Prayer Service for Ordinary Time: Gift of Grace • 9

Catechists' Retreat for Ordinary Time: Stewards of God's Gifts • 11

Bulletin Insert for Ordinary Time • 13

Prayer Service for Advent/Christmas: The Gift of the Incarnation • 14

Catechists' Retreat for Advent: Becoming Grateful Stewards of God's Love • 17

Bulletin Insert for Advent/Christmas • 19

Catechists' Prayer Service for Lent/Easter: The Gift of Forgiveness • 20

Catechists' Retreat for Lent: Less Is More—Becoming Stewards of God's Love • 23

Servicio de Oración para Catequistas para la Apertura del Programa: Corresponsables de los dones de Dios • 25

Servicio de Oración para Catequistas para el Tiempo Ordinario: Don de Gracia • 28

Servicio de Oración para el Adviento y la Navidad: El Regalo de la Encarnación • 31

Servicio de Oración para Catequistas para el Tiempo de Cuaresma y Pascua: El Regalo del Perdón • 34

Para ejemplos de retiros en español para el año catequético, vea la página *www.usccb.org/publishing/catsun.htm* en la Internet.

Welcoming Meeting for Parents and Children: Stewards of God's Gifts

Some parishes begin each catechetical year with a meeting to welcome parents and children, introduce them to the teachers and to the program, and share with them information concerning the program year. This session is designed to be used as part of such an introductory meeting. The Family Commitment Prayer cards (see *Celebrating Catechetical Sunday 2004*, the first booklet of Stewards of God's Gifts resources) can be used as part of this event.

PREPARATION FOR OPENING ACTIVITY

Before the gathering, prepare a small gift bag for each family. Inside the gift bag, place a small card with a word written on it from the following "gift list": imagination, faith, holiness, piety, courage, knowledge, generosity, joyfulness, sensitivity, caring, kindness, healing, sense of humor, laughter, gentleness, love of nature, and peacefulness. (Feel free to add to the list other gifts you think are important.)

Imagination

As each family enters, ask them to choose one gift bag at the entrance. Tell them not to open the bag until they are instructed to do so. Give out no handouts other than name tags at this time so as not to distract families from the opening activity.

OPENING ACTIVITY (20 MINUTES)

When all have gathered, use the ideas below to stimulate a group discussion.

- Think of a time when you were asked to care for something that belonged to someone else. (Examples include being asked by neighbors to babysit a child for an hour, to feed a cat for a week, or to watch a house in their absence.) What were you asked to care for? How did you feel about being asked to take on this responsibility? What efforts did you make to fulfill this responsibility? How did you feel when everything went well? How did you feel when something went wrong?

After a few minutes, ask for responses from the group. Then introduce the Gospel reading by saying that Jesus tells us that it is important that we be people who can be trusted to care for all of God's gifts.

The reader proclaims the Gospel from Year C, Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Lk 16:1-13).

Now ask each family to open the small bag they received when they entered and to take out the "gift" they find inside. Ask the parents and children to talk about how they could use the gift listed on the card to care for themselves and others. After about five minutes of discussion, ask for volunteers to name the gift they received and then to share how they might use the gift. Conclude by saying that Jesus wants us to discover God's great gifts (name some of them if they were not shared earlier in the group discussion), and that he wants us to use them wisely and carefully, to let them grow in us and in the world through our sharing. Emphasize that this is what we mean when we say that Jesus wants us to become good *stewards of God's gifts*.

YEAR-OPENING INFORMATION/QUESTIONS (30 MINUTES)

After the blessing (see page 5), children may stay with their parents or go to a separate area for an age-appropriate catechetical activity.

You may wish to introduce your catechists at this time. This is also the time to share information and details about this year's catechetical program. Be sure to allow time to answer any questions the parents may have.

INTRODUCTION AND BLESSING OF THE STEWARDS OF GOD'S GIFTS

(10 MINUTES)

LEADER:

This year we hope to discover and to share God's gifts together. When we listen to God's Word, celebrate his love in the sacraments, and pray and learn from one another, we grow as followers of Jesus and act as good stewards of his gifts. We need one another to do this. *(Invite all the catechists present to stand.)*

LEADER:

Let us pray for the women and men who, as catechists, share with us their faith, their time, their skills, and their enthusiasm for the Word of God. (*Take a moment for silent prayer.*) May they always be good stewards of God's gifts. We pray to the Lord: ℟. (The response is "*Lord, hear our prayer.*") *(Invite all the parents/guardians to stand.)*

LEADER:

Let us pray for those women and men who, as parents, give life to their children, nurturing them through lived example, love, and prayerful guidance. (*Take a moment for silent prayer.*) May they always be good and faithful stewards of God's gifts. We pray to the Lord: ℟. *(Invite all the children to stand.)*

LEADER:

Let us pray for these children who share with us their awe and wonder in appreciation of God and their openness to faith. (*Take a moment for silent prayer.*) May they always be good stewards of God's gifts. We pray to the Lord: ℟.

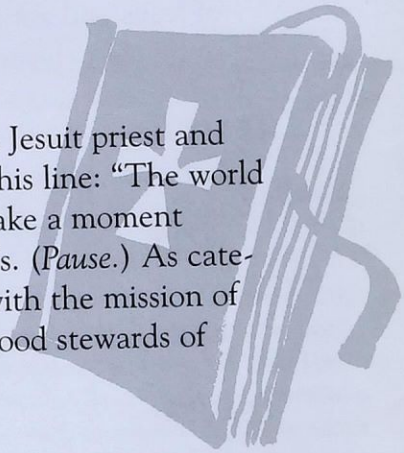
Gracious God, we ask you to bless our year together. May we know your great love for us and discover all the gifts of life you give us to share. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, through the Holy Spirit. (℟. Amen.)

CATECHISTS' PRAYER SERVICE FOR OPENING OF PROGRAM YEAR

Stewards of God's Gifts

PREPARATION

Prepare the room by setting out a Bible, a small candle for each participant (or one large candle), matches, and a crucifix.



LEADER:

(*Welcome everyone.*) Gerard Manley Hopkins, a Jesuit priest and poet, began his poem "God's Grandeur" with this line: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God." Let us take a moment and let our minds form a picture of these words. (*Pause.*) As catechists, teachers, and parents, we are charged with the mission of discipleship. As disciples, we are called to be good stewards of God's generous gifts.

OPENING SONG

Sing the first verse of "Many and Great, O God" (Dakota Hymn, *Dakota Odowan*, 1879) *or a similar song.*

OPENING PRAYER

ALL:

Almighty God, we gather in your name. You entrust to our care the men and women, young adults, youth, and children whom you have created. We answer your call to service with open arms and hearts. Amen.

READER:

Let us listen to St. Peter's description of what it means to be a steward. (*Read aloud 1 Peter 4:10-11.*) Please turn to one another and talk about what it means to you to be God's co-worker.

INTERCESSIONS

READER:

Lord God, as your stewards, we receive your gifts gratefully.

ALL:

Help us respond to the needs of those we serve.

READER:

As your stewards, we cherish your gifts.

ALL:

Help us model reverence for your great gift of life.

READER:

As your stewards, we use your gifts responsibly.

ALL:

Help us lead children, youths, and adults to appreciate the beauty and wonder of all your creation.

READER:

As your stewards, we share your gifts of justice and love with others.

ALL:

Help us teach people a sense of the oneness and the interdependence of all living things. Help us remember that what hurts one part of your creation hurts us all.

RITUAL ACTION OF COMMITMENT

LEADER:

(*Light a candle.*) Loving Father, send us your Holy Spirit so that your light within us may charge our catechetical ministry with your greatness.

BLESSING

PRIEST:

May God who has gifted you bless you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

LEADER:

May God who has begun good work in us bring it to fulfillment. Amen.

CLOSING SONG

Sing the second verse of "Many and Great, O God" (Dakota Hymn, *Dakota Odowan*, 1879).

CATECHISTS' PRAYER SERVICE FOR ORDINARY TIME

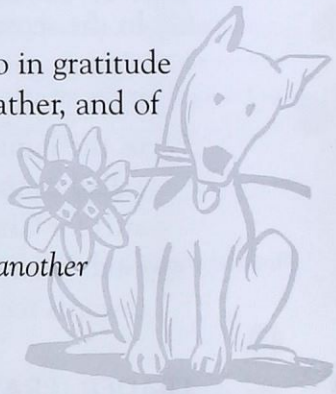
Gift of Grace

PREPARATION

Set a table with a piece of green fabric or paper, a candle, a Bible, and a cross. Use gift wrap to decorate an empty box and place it on the table.

LEADER:

As we gather together, let us remember that we do so in gratitude for the love and mercy of God. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



OPENING SONG

Sing "Prayer of St. Francis" (Sebastian Temple, OCP) *or another suitable song.*

LEADER:

We are pilgrims on a journey. God asks us to invite others to the journey, to make their own path. Legend has it that St. Francis of Assisi urged those who would listen to go and share the Gospel at all times, using words when they are needed. The example we set speaks volumes to those who see us. Anyone who has spent much time around children knows how quick they are to imitate an adult's behavior—for better or worse. As we reflect upon the words of St. Paul in the following readings, let us pray for a deeper understanding of God's love for all of humanity.

READINGS

Ephesians 2:8-10: "For by grace you have been saved through faith . . ."
2 Corinthians 5:16-21: ". . . So whoever is in Christ is a new creation . . ."

SILENT REFLECTION

LEADER:

What does it mean when Paul says to the Ephesians "for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God"?

Refer to the gift-wrapped box on the table. Ask each person to name one "gift of grace" they have received from God. Ask how each one is acting as a good steward of that gift. Participants respond and discuss this passage in light of their individual roles as catechists, teachers, parents, or students.

LEADER:

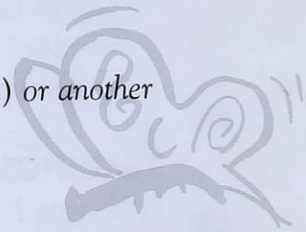
In the second reading, Paul writes that if anyone is in Christ, the old has gone away and the new has come. All of this is from the Father who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. As ministers of his Word, we are called to share this message of reconciliation. As such, we are stewards for Christ, entreating others on his behalf to be reconciled to God. What does that mean for you? How can you urge others towards reconciliation with God? (*Participants respond and discuss.*)

LEADER (PRAYER):

Loving Father, our actions speak louder than our words. May all we say and do reflect your light and love to those who are afraid to be touched by you. Grant us the courage to speak and live the truth, to be your stewards in word and deed. Thank you, Lord, for the privilege of sharing your truth with others. (*All respond: Amen.*)

CLOSING SONG

Sing "Amazing Grace" (John Newton, Hope Publishing Co.) *or another suitable song.*



Catechists' Retreat for Ordinary Time
Stewards of God's Gifts

This retreat is designed to be a two-hour morning, afternoon, or evening experience.

PREPARATION

- Reserve a large space where people can move comfortably and break into smaller groups without disturbing others. You may also prefer to use other rooms for small-group break-out experiences. For the Story Circle activity, arrange a large space in a half-circle.

- Make "journals" for each participant out of two sheets of plain-colored paper, folded in the middle with a ribbon strung through the center. If possible, use the Catechetical Sunday 2004 logo for the front-cover design. Include (as a box, with acknowledgment to USCCB for copyrighted texts) a copy of the Gospel reading for Catechetical Sunday (Lk 16:1-13), the reflection questions below, and the closing prayer.

- Set up newsprint with markers and tape.

- Prepare refreshments for the break.

- Prepare heart symbols for each participant to distribute at the closing prayer. These can be made of any material, for example, a small glass or plastic paperweight, a felt cutout, or a painted heart on a small stone.

WELCOME AND ICEBREAKERS (10 MINUTES)

Ask participants as they enter to choose a nametag, which is cut into either a heart or a diamond shape (of any color). Ask participants to recall any memories they may have that are connected to sitting and listening to stories. Invite them to sit back now and relax as they prepare to listen to the following story. Remind them that the greatest truths are often told most fully through the medium of story.

STORY CIRCLE (10 MINUTES)

Ask different people to read the parts of the narrator and the characters in the "The Parable of the Dishonest Steward" (Lk 16:1-10). Or ask one person to read the text and invite others to act out the roles in the story. Actors should remain in a "freeze" position when their part is finished.

QUIET TIME WITH JOURNALS (20 MINUTES)

Distribute journals and pencils. Invite participants to sit quietly (or to go to a quiet place) to reflect on the reading in light of the questions posed in the journal. Possible journal questions include the following:

- Who are you most like in this story?

- Do you have any of the characteristics of the steward?

- If yes, which ones?

- What are some of the gifts you have in your life (material and non-material)?*

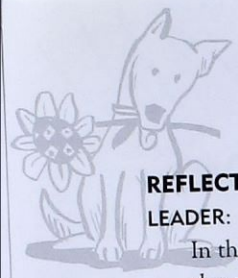
- What challenges do you face that hinder you from becoming a good steward of God's gifts?*

(See the USCCB website at *www.usccb.org/publishing/catsun.htm* for additional journal questions.)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (20 MINUTES)

Ask participants to join with three other people who have nametags in the same shape as theirs. Share comments/responses from the questions above marked with asterisks (*). Elicit feedback from the large group. Have them jot down main points on newsprint paper.

BREAK (20 MINUTES)



REFLECTION (5 MINUTES)

LEADER:

In the Gospel story of the dishonest steward, what is shared or squandered is not as important as how the details of the sharing are ultimately resolved. What matters most is the attitude one has toward sharing, especially in the heart of the person called to do the sharing. (See the USCCB website at *www.usccb.org/publishing/catsum.htm* for additional reflection ideas.)

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION (15-20 MINUTES)

Invite the group to share ideas and insights evoked by the reflection.

CLOSING PRAYER (10 MINUTES)

Call forth and bless the catechists as good stewards of God's gifts.

LEADER:

Let us pray: Almighty God, you are a generous master, who shares with us the abundance of your gifts and calls us to care for those gifts by nurturing them in others. You call us to share with the same love you have for us. We ask you to bless us as we go forth today. Help us to be people of generous hearts who share ourselves so that others might know that you live in our hearts. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who shows us the way. Receive a sign of the heart of the Master. Live close to the Master's heart and become a good steward of God's gifts. (*Now ask participants to take a heart symbol from a basket that is passed around.*)

CLOSING PRAYER

Recite the Lord's Prayer.

REFLECTION

LEADER:

In the Gospel story, the dishonest steward learns a lesson the hard way. He must have known the punishment for cheating and manipulating: he would be banished from employment anywhere again! Yet the master deals with him in a most surprising way: the steward is granted *generous mercy* from the heart of the master. We do not know if the steward was wise enough to develop a heart like the master's or if he became complacent and settled back to his old conniving ways again.

Additional Journal Questions

(An asterisk indicates questions that might be shared in large groups or placed on newsprint.)

1. If you were the master in Jesus' parable, how might you have dealt with the dishonest steward? Did the master's response surprise you? Why or why not?

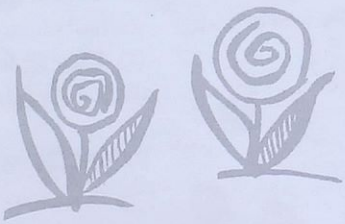
2. What lesson did the dishonest steward learn from the master?

3. What influences your decisions on how you use the gifts God gives you?*

4. Who in your life has been a model for you of good stewardship?

5. What will you need to change to develop the heart of the steward?

6. How can we support one another in the call to be stewards of God's gifts?*



Stewards of God's Gifts

BULLETIN INSERT FOR ORDINARY TIME

The late summer weeks of Ordinary Time are anything but "ordinary." As Catechetical Sunday (September 19, 2004) approaches, parishes work at fever pitch with energies focused on a new catechetical year and on the challenge of being "stewards of God's gifts." This year, let us raise up in prayer those commissioned publicly as catechists, and may we never forget our essential role in catechesis!

We are all called to be "stewards of God's gifts" this Catechetical Sunday. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' statement *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response* describes a Christian steward as one who "receives God's gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner, shares them in justice and love with others, and returns them with increase to the Lord." This rich definition offers us much to consider.

Catechesis is the responsibility of the entire faith community, not only of those who through ordination or commission have public catechetical roles. The youngsters in the parish who recently celebrated First Communion, the retired couple sitting behind you at Mass, even those parishioners who sit at the end of the aisle and make others crawl over them to get to an empty seat in church all share responsibility for catechesis in the parish.

The gift we focus on today is faith. God gives faith freely through the Church. Every baptized member shares responsibility for cherishing and tending this precious jewel. We live it faithfully, sharing it with young and old, and return it to God with abundance in praise and worship.

Never doubt the power of faith. By living the faith, we offer a powerful witness to all those we meet in our parish, in our homes, in our workplaces and schools, at the mall, at the grocery store, or on the athletic field, among other places.

As our parish prepares for and celebrates Catechetical Sunday 2004, here are a few reflections to help us assess how well we are doing as stewards of God's gifts:

1. Do I "receive my gift of faith gratefully" by
   - Thanking God for my parish?
   - Pausing to acknowledge blessings?
   - Appreciating parents and relatives?
   - Thanking God for my co-workers?

2. Have I "tended my faith" by
   - Participating in faith formation in the last two years?
   - Countering negativity about the parish or work with a positive comment?
   - Setting aside time each week to read the Bible?
   - Praying each day as a family?

3. Do I "share faith with others" by
   - Responding to needs at the parish and in the community?
   - Singing and participating at Mass?
   - Greeting the stranger beside me?

4. Finally, will I "return the gift of faith with increase" by
   - Remembering in prayer all those who have formed me in faith: priests, men and women religious, catechists, parishioners, grandparents, parents, relatives, godparents, and friends?

Let us strive to be good stewards of God's gifts by living as if our faith and the faith of our families and parish depend on it. (They just might!)

Consider including the above message or one like it as an insert in your parish bulletin during Ordinary Time.

PRAYER SERVICE FOR ADVENT/CHRISTMAS

The Gift of the Incarnation

PREPARATION

Set up a table with a purple table covering, a Bible, a crucifix, four candles (or an Advent wreath), and a bowl of sand. Also have available an unlit taper to give to each participant.

OPENING SONG

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" (Traditional)

LEADER:

As we enter this season of darkness and expectation, let us relax and enjoy a few moments together. (*Pause.*) Let us give thanks to the Lord our God!

ALL:

It is right to give him thanks and praise!

READING

Luke 1:39-45: "Mary Visits Elizabeth"

REFLECTION

The leader speaks briefly about the gift of the Incarnation—God becoming man and dwelling among us—and about how this season can be a time of both joyful anticipation and dreadful anxiety.

INTERCESSIONS

LEADER:

Jesus, we bring our hope and our fears to this place. Strengthen us for our work as catechists as we share your light with others at work, at school, and in our own homes. (*The response is "Come, Lord Jesus, show us the way."*)

LEADER:

That all who spend the holidays alone will find comfort and friendship, we pray to the Lord: ℟.

LEADER:

That families who are stretched in too many directions will find moments of peace during this holy time of year, we pray to the Lord: ℟.

LEADER:

That students who struggle with studies and peers will find respite in the joy of the season, we pray to the Lord: ℟.

LEADER:

That we will reach the poor with food and warmth through our churches and families, we pray to the Lord: ℟.

LEADER:

That our nation's leaders will seek truth in all they do and say, we pray to the Lord: ℟.

Invite others to add their own intercessions.

LEADER:

This is a special time of year. During this season, prepare to celebrate the Lord's coming. Pray that you may be prepared for all that comes to pass. Ask God for the wisdom and strength you need to be a good steward of all the gifts that you have received.

Allow a moment of silence. Then invite participants to light their tapers and place them in the bowl of sand.

PRAYER

ALL:

Loving Father, you sent us your Son that we might know how much you love us. Help us to savor that love, especially during this season of anticipation and joy. Jesus, you lived among us and were like us in all ways but sin. Help us to follow your example. Holy Spirit, you animate all of creation with your goodness and grace. Fill our hearts with abundant love for those around us. We ask this through Christ, our Lord, through the Holy Spirit. Amen.

CLOSING SONG

Sing "Every Valley" (Dufford, OCP) *or another suitable song.*

Catechists' Retreat for Advent: Becoming Grateful Stewards of God's Love

Set aside two to three hours during Advent for this retreat. Consider ending the retreat with a shared meal.

PREPARATION

- Arrange to have music, either live or recorded. All suggested music selections below are on the album *Feast of Life* (© Marty Haugen and Gary Daigle; Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2000). Any music that speaks about sharing God's gifts would be appropriate for use.

- Set up a prayer table with an Advent wreath. Place small vigil candles around it, one for each participant.

- Have enough paper and pens available for each participant.

- The retreat facilitator should be prepared to offer a ten- to fifteen-minute reflection on what it means for Christians to be called to be stewards of God's gifts. Discuss the transformational power of recognizing our gifts and using them in service with others. Refer specifically to catechetical ministry as a way to share our gifts in service to others. The book *Radical Gratitude* by Mary Jo Leddy (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002) may be of value in preparing this reflection.

GATHERING

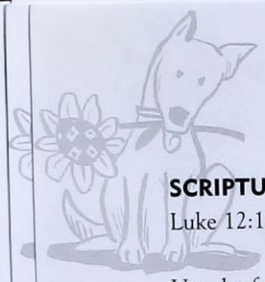
- Welcome catechists to this retreat and thank them for coming. Explain to them that over the next several hours, they will have an opportunity to think and pray about the many gifts they have received from God, and how they are called to be stewards of those gifts, nurturing them so they can be shared with others.

- Light the appropriate number of candles on the Advent wreath. Invite those gathered to join in singing the refrain of "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" (Traditional) or another Advent song as you light the candles.

- Ask participants to sit quietly, with eyes closed and feet on the floor. Have them take several deep breaths. Invite them to listen carefully to the music and words that will be played. What images are formed in their minds by the song? (Play a song such as "Where Your Treasure Is" [©Marty Haugen and Gary Daigle; Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2000].)

- When the song is over, allow participants to sit quietly for a few minutes thinking about the words and music they've heard. Then ask them to turn to a neighbor to share what they have gained from the song. After several minutes of sharing in small groups, invite anyone who wishes to share their thoughts with the large group to do so.

- Invite participants now to think about the treasures that they have been given. Ask them to make a list of personal gifts they have for which they are grateful. Personal gifts might include such non-material things as being generous, being caring, being a good listener, or being hospitable. After about three minutes, lead participants in a prayer of thanksgiving for these gifts. Encourage participants to share their own prayers aloud.



SCRIPTURE TO PONDER

Luke 12:16-21: "Parable of the Rich Fool"

Use the following method (based on *Lectio Divina*) to reflect on the Scripture passage:

- Read the Scripture passage aloud. Ask the group to listen for a word or phrase that touches their hearts.
- Re-read the Scripture passage aloud. Ask the group to reflect on the following questions: How does the reading speak to my life today? How does it speak to my work in catechetical ministry?
- Read the Scripture passage aloud a third time. Ask the group to reflect on the following question: What emotion—such as gratitude, happiness, or anger—did the reading evoke in you? Participants might offer a short prayer at this time.
- Read the Scripture passage aloud once more. Invite the group to sit in silence and to allow the Scripture to penetrate their hearts.

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY

Allow ten to fifteen minutes for this reflection, inviting participants to move into a quiet space by themselves.

- Have each participant review the gifts or treasures they listed earlier to choose the one that is most important to them. As they look at each gift, they should cross off the ones they think are less important. Have them continue to do this until only one gift remains.
- Explain that, while they each *have* many special gifts, the one they chose reflects the special gift they *are* to others. Have them work quietly on this exercise.
- After the group has reconvened, ask participants to turn to their neighbor and share their remaining gift. What has this experience meant to them?
- When you reconvene the large group, encourage participants to share aloud the insights and inspirations they gained from this process.

FACILITATOR'S REFLECTION

Share prepared reflections with the participants about how we are called to be stewards of God's gifts.

RESPONSE AND RITUAL ACTIVITY

Gather in a circle around the Advent wreath. Invite each person to light a small candle off of the Advent wreath and pray, *"I thank you God for the gift of _____, given to me to bring your life to others."* In a prayerful response, ask the group to share how they see the different gifts named as a way of becoming stewards of God's love. Conclude the retreat by playing the song "Where Your Treasure Is" (*Feast of Life*, GIA) or another appropriate song. Exchange a sign of peace.

Stewards of God's Gifts

BULLETIN INSERT FOR ADVENT/CHRISTMAS

Last September parishes across the United States celebrated Catechetical Sunday and focused on the year-long challenge to be "stewards of God's gifts." The responsibility of sharing the gift of God's Word lies with the entire parish community—the pastor, parish staff, catechists, and you!

The *General Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana–United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998) notes the importance of one's family and the parish community in the formation and expression of faith. Creating a place where the Word dwells, where faith is shared and received, where all are fed and nurtured, and where the gift of faith is passed to future generations is quite a responsibility, both for the family and for the parish.

When you see the people in your family and in your parish, be aware of God's presence there. What can you do to make your home and your parish better faith communities? This is what good stewards do: they preserve and improve the gifts placed in their care.

The Advent and Christmas seasons are especially good times to reflect on the gift of God's Word. Hearts, young and old, blaze anew each year as we draw near the manger. "And the Word became flesh / and made his dwelling among us" (Jn 1:14).

In response to this great gift, we are challenged first to pledge anew to become who we claim to be: graced people in whose midst the presence of Jesus is alive in word, in sacrament, and in our gathered community. Second, we must make use of every opportunity we have to share God's Word wherever we are—at the parish, at home, at school, and at work. This is also what good stewards do: they make others aware of the special gifts they share.

Here are few things that you can do to be good stewards of God's gifts during this sacred time of year:

AT THE PARISH: (1) Pledge to arrive early to Mass each week during this Advent and Christmas season. Use the additional time for personal prayer or to chat with fellow parishioners. (2) Set aside fifteen minutes daily to read and pray the season's Scripture readings. You can find each day's readings at *http://www.usccb.org/nab/index.htm*. (3) Invite a family new to the parish to join your family for bagels and coffee one Sunday. (4) Make a special effort to welcome home the young adults who have been away at college or the military when they return to the parish for the holidays.

AT HOME: (1) Set up your Nativity set (also called a crèche) in a prominent place. Leave the manger empty. Develop a family tradition of gathering around the crèche each night to pray for people in need of food and shelter. Adults and children may add one piece of straw to the manger each night for every act of kindness they have done that day. In this way you are preparing a bed for Jesus. (2) Take turns acting out the Advent and Christmas stories. (3) Rededicate yourselves to family prayer by praying the rosary.

AT WORK: (1) Organize a food drive for local food banks. (2) Transform coffee breaks into "good news breaks:" opportunities to compliment or share a positive word with or about a co-worker. (3) Send a note to someone who is ill. (4) Secretly pray for your least favorite co-worker during this season.

Feast heartily on God's Word this Advent-Christmas season. It will transform your parish, your family, your workplace, and yourself. (For an extended list of Advent and Christmas ideas, visit the USCCB website at *www.usccb.org/publishing/catsun.htm*.)

Consider including the above message or one like it as an insert in your parish bulletin during the Advent/Christmas season.

CATECHISTS' PRAYER SERVICE FOR LENT/EASTER:

The Gift of Forgiveness

PREPARATION

Scatter letter-writing materials (e.g., pens and pencils, plain paper, envelopes, stamps) around a candle and a cross.

SONG

Sing "Hosea" (Gregory Norbet, Benedictine Foundation of the State of Vermont, Inc.) *or another suitable song.*

LEADER:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

ALL:

Amen.

LEADER:

Loving God, we come together to reflect upon our lives during this holy season. Be with us as we seek your peace.

READINGS

John 8:1-11: "A Woman Caught in Adultery"
Luke 6:37-38: "Judging Others"

REFLECTION

Ask participants to sit so they are comfortable. Each reflection may be read by a single leader or by different participants. Allow a pause after each one.

LEADER:

What are the issues or circumstances in my life in which I can speak the truth of God's ways, but am unable to live them?

ALL:

Lord, grant me the courage to walk in your path.

LEADER:

Of whom have I been critical recently, whether justified or not? What if I turned that judgment against myself?

ALL:

Jesus, you are compassionate and call us to reflect your compassion to others. Help me to remember that you love us all.

LEADER:

When have I dared to share aspects of my faith that run contrary to the world's views?

ALL:

Lord, give me the confidence to share your story and mine with others.

LEADER:

Whom do I serve? What are the people, the opinions, the possessions, or the roles that control my life?

ALL:

Jesus, make me aware of the ways I seek—knowingly or unknowingly—to deny the call to holiness.

LEADER:

When have I refused to forgive, spending the time instead nurturing my own injured feelings?

ALL:

Lord, you are kind and merciful, slow to anger and quick to forgive. Help me take the first step in repairing a relationship.

LEADER:

Lent is a time in which to seek and extend forgiveness. You are invited to take a piece of paper and an envelope from the table. Write a brief letter to someone—it could be to yourself—about a way that you, as a catechist, both need and extend forgiveness. Whether you mail it is up to you!

Allow five minutes for letter writing. Play music softly in the background.

PRAYER

ALL:

Loving God, I repent for all my false and empty gods. Help me to remember that I am in need of forgiveness. Grant that I may be like clay in your loving hands. Mold and transform me. Give me the courage to forgive when my head and heart insist on holding a grudge. Thank you for the precious gift of forgiveness, and help me to share it with others through my ministry as a catechist and in all aspects of my life. Amen.

CLOSING SONG

"*Hosea*" (Gregory Norbet, Benedictine Foundation of the State of Vermont, Inc.)

Catechists' Retreat for Lent: Less Is More—Becoming Stewards of God's Love

Set aside two to three hours during Lent for this retreat followed by a light meal.

PREPARATION

Arrange for music, either live or recorded. All suggested music selections are on the album *Feast of Life* (© Marty Haugen and Gary Daigle; Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2000). Any music that speaks about sharing God's gifts would be appropriate. Set up a prayer table with a decorative cloth, a Bible, and a large candle. Have in the prayer space enough empty bowls for each participant. Also provide Bibles for all participants.

GATHERING

Play the song "Where Your Treasure Is" (from *Feast of Life)* or other appropriate music. As the song is playing, have participants take an empty bowl as a reminder that God will give them all that they need for the day. Light the candle and proclaim the Scripture: Luke 13:22-34: "Dependence on God."

Ask participants to think of a time in their lives when they found that "less is more." Ask people to share their stories in small groups. After about five minutes, ask participants to discuss this question: "How is recognizing that the gift of life is enough *spiritually transformative*?" Finally, after another five minutes or so, ask the small groups to discuss how their work in catechesis transforms them. You may wish to have people share their thoughts in the large group following the small group discussions.

LIFE REVIEW EXERCISE

As people participate in this exercise, be sure to allow them enough time to give the questions serious consideration.

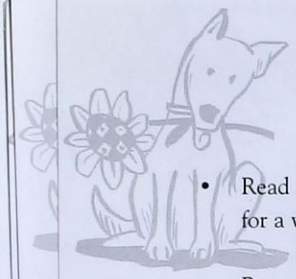
Explain that the next activity will be a life review exercise. They are to recall the significant events of their lives and record them on a piece of paper. When finished, they are to review what they have written and add the prayer, "It would have been enough," where appropriate. Here are some examples (taken from *Radical Gratitude* by Mary Jo Leddy, p. 55) to get them started:

- If I had been an only child and not had a baby sister, *it would have been enough.*
- If I had only had a baby sister but had not had my best friend, it *would have been enough.*
- If I had only seen one snowfall but had never seen the pink sky on a prairie night, *it would have been enough.*

As a group, discuss what insights emerged from this exercise.

SCRIPTURE TO PONDER

Use the following method (based on *Lectio Divina*) to reflect on the Scripture passage from the Gospel of Luke 12:22-34, "Dependence on God."



- Read the Scripture passage. Ask the group to listen for a word or phrase that touches their hearts.

- Re-read the Scripture passage. Ask the group to reflect on the following questions: How does the reading speak to your life today? How does it speak to your work in catechetical ministry?

- Read the Scripture passage a third time. Ask the group to reflect on the following question: What emotion—such as gratitude, happiness, or anger—did the reading evoke in you? A short prayer also may be said.

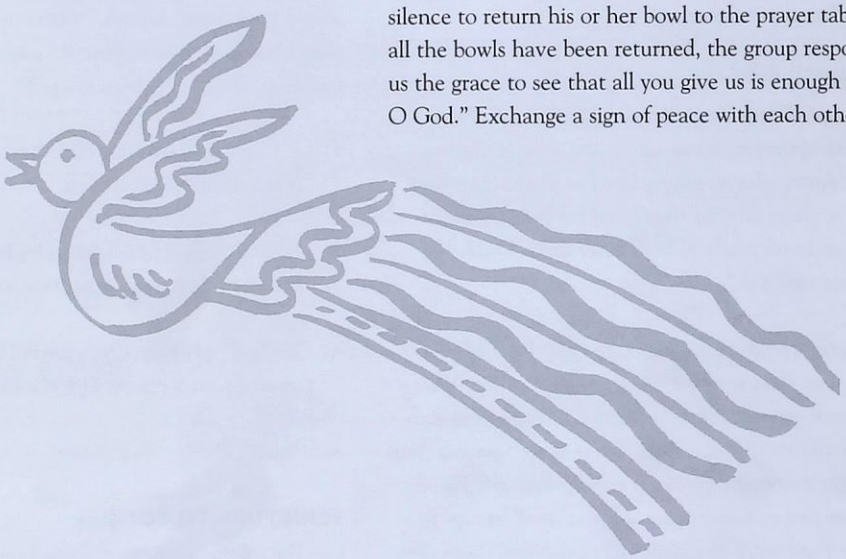
- Read the Scripture passage once more. Invite the group to sit in silence and to allow the Scripture to penetrate their hearts.

REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY

After a short break, distribute Bibles to each participant. Allow time for each person to find a story or passage in the Scriptures that speaks to them at this time in their lives. Have participants identify things in their lives that need to be removed in order to make more room for God. Focus on the concept of "less is more." Discuss together what the word "enough" means to them now and what it meant at various times in their lives. Ask what difference it makes to identify what is *enough* in our lives? How does this change the way we relate to the things and the people in our lives? Ask participants to share aloud their chosen Scripture passage and comments. What do these passages tell us about being good stewards?

RESPONSE AND RITUAL ACTIVITY

Gather around the prayer table with the empty bowls and Bibles. Pray Psalm 139 together. Invite each person in silence to return his or her bowl to the prayer table. After all the bowls have been returned, the group responds, "Give us the grace to see that all you give us is enough each day, O God." Exchange a sign of peace with each other.



SERVICIO DE ORACIÓN PARA CATEQUISTAS PARA LA APERTURA DEL PROGRAMA

Corresponsables de los dones de Dios

PREPARACIÓN

Preparar el salón colocando una Biblia, un cirio para cada participante (o un cirio grande) y un crucifijo.

GUÍA:

(Dar la bienvenida a todos). Gerard Manley Hopkins, sacerdote jesuita y poeta, comenzó su poema "la grandeza de Dios" con esta frase: "El mundo esta cargado con la grandeza de Dios". Vamos a tomar un momento y dejar que formar en nuestras mentes una imagen de estas palabras. (*Pausa*). Como catequistas, maestros y padres de familia, estamos encargados con la misión de ser discípulos. Como discípulos, somos llamados a ser buenos corresponsables de los dones generosos de Dios.

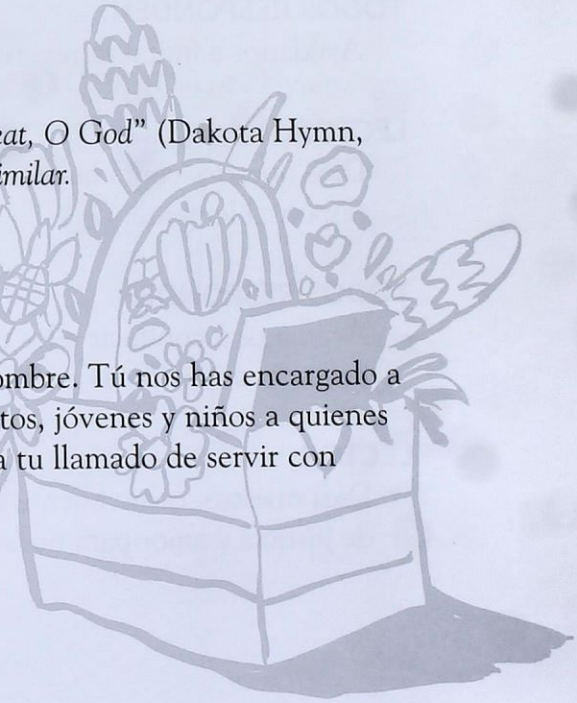
CANCIÓN DE APERTURA

Cantar el primer verso de "Many and Great, O God" (Dakota Hymn, Dakota Odowan, 1879) *o una canción similar.*

ORACIÓN DE APERTURA

TODOS RESPONDEN:

Dios creador, nos juntamos en tu nombre. Tú nos has encargado a los hombres y mujeres, jóvenes adultos, jóvenes y niños a quienes has creado. Nosotros respondemos a tu llamado de servir con corazones y brazos abiertos. Amén.



LECTOR:

Escuchemos la descripción de San Pedro de ¿Qué significa ser corresponsable? (*En voz alta leer 1 Pedro 4:10-11*). Se les pide a los participantes compartir con otra persona: ¿Qué significa ser un buen administrador de los diversos dones de Dios?

INTERCESIONES

LECTOR:

Dios nuestro, como buenos corresponsables recibimos tus dones con gratitud.

TODOS RESPONDEN:

Ayúdanos a responder a las necesidades de aquellos a quienes servimos.

LECTOR:

Dios nuestro, como buenos corresponsables apreciamos los dones que nos has otorgado.

TODOS RESPONDEN:

Ayúdanos a imitar la reverencia por el gran regalo de la vida.

LECTOR:

Dios nuestro, como buenos corresponsables, utilizamos tus dones responsablemente.

TODOS RESPONDEN:

Ayúdanos a conducir a los niños, jóvenes y adultos a apreciar la belleza y maravilla de toda tu creación.

LECTOR:

Dios nuestro, como buenos corresponsables compartimos los dones de justicia y amor para nuestro prójimo.

TODOS RESPONDEN:

Ayúdanos a enseñar a tu pueblo a obtener un sentido de unidad y dependencia mutua de todo lo creado. Ayúdanos a recordar que lo que lastima a una parte de la creación afecta a todos.

RITUAL DE COMPROMISO

GUÍA:

(*Encender un cirio*) Dios de amor, envíanos tu Espíritu Santo para que tu luz dentro de nosotros insufle con tu grandeza nuestro ministerio catequético.

BENDICIÓN

SACERDOTE:

Dios nuestro, quien les ha otorgado diversos dones, los bendiga en el nombre del Padre, y el Hijo, y el Espíritu Santo. Amén.

GUÍA (LAICO):

Que Dios, quien ha iniciado buenas obras en nosotros, las lleve a su cumplimiento. Amén.

CANCIÓN DE CLAUSURA

Cantar el segundo verso de "Many and Great, O God" (Dakota Hymn, Dakota Odowan, 1879) *o una canción similar.*

SERVICIO DE ORACIÓN PARA CATEQUISTAS PARA EL TIEMPO ORDINARIO

Don de Gracia

PREPARACIÓN

Arreglar una mesa con un mantel (o un pedazo de tela) color verde, un cirio, una Biblia y un crucifijo. Utilizar papel de regalo para decorar una caja vacía y colocarl ésta en la mesa.

GUÍA:

Al congregarnos aquí, recordemos que lo hacemos con gratitud por el amor y misericordia de Dios. En el nombre del Padre, y del Hijo, y del Espíritu Santo. Amén.

CANCIÓN DE APERTURA

Cantar "La Oración de San Francisco" (Sebastian Temple, OCP) *u otra canción apropiada.*

GUÍA:

Somos peregrinos en una viaje. Dios nos pide que invitemos a otros al viaje para que ellos se hagan su propio camino. La leyenda dice que San Francisco de Asís exhortaba a quienes lo escuchaban a ir a compartir el Evangelio en todo tiempo y utilizando palabras de ser necesario. El ejemplo que demos hablará volúmenes a los que nos vean. Cualquiera que haya pasado tiempo junto a los niños sabe cuán rápido imitan ellos el comportamiento de los adultos, para bien o para mal. Al reflexionar sobre las palabras de San Pablo en las siguientes lecturas, oremos para tener un comprensión más profunda del amor que tiene Dios por toda la humanidad.

LECTURAS BÍBLICAS

Efesios 2:8-10: "Pues por la gracia de Dios han recibido ustedes la salvación por medio de la fe".

2 Corintios 5:16-21: "Por lo tanto, el que está unido a Cristo es una nueva persona".

REFLEXIÓN EN SILENCIO

GUÍA:

¿Qué se quiere significar cuándo San Pablo dice a los Efesios, "Pues por la gracia de Dios han recibido ustedes la salvación por medio de la fe. No es esto algo que ustedes mismos hayan conseguido, sino que les ha sido dado por Dios"?

Referirse a la caja envuelta en papel de regalo sobre la mesa. Preguntar a cada persona que nombre un "don de gracia" que haya recibido Preguntar de Dios. Preguntar a cada uno: ¿Cómo has actuado como buen administrador de los dones recibidos? Los participantes deberán responder y dialogar sobre este pasaje a luz de sus roles individuales como catequistas, maestros, padres de familia o como estudiantes.

GUÍA:

En la segunda lectura, Pablo escribe que si una persona está en Cristo, lo antiguo ha pasado y lo nuevo ha llegado. Todo eso es obra de Dios, que nos reconcilió con él en Cristo y que a nosotros nos encomienda el mensaje de la reconciliación. Como ministros de la Palabra de Dios, somos llamados a compartir este mensaje de reconciliación. Como tales, somos corresponsables al servico de Cristo, rogando a otros a nombre de Cristo para que se reconcilien con Dios. ¿Qué significa esto para ustedes? ¿Cómo pueden ustedes exhortar a otros a que se reconcilien con Dios? (Se da a los participantes la oportunidad de responder y discutir).

GUÍA (ORACIÓN)

Padre amoroso, nuestras acciones hablan más fuerte que nuestras palabras. Que todo lo que decimos y hacemos reflejen siempre tu luz y amor por todos aquellos que sienten temor de ser tocados por ti. Otórganos el valor de hablar y vivir la verdad para ser buenos corresponsables en palabra y hecho. Gracias, Señor, por el privilegio de compartir tu verdad con otros.

TODOS RESPONDEN:

Amén.

CANCIÓN DE CLAUSURA

Cantar "Amazing Grace" (Newton, Hope Publishing Co.) *u otra canción apropiada.*

SERVICIO DE ORACIÓN PARA EL ADVIENTO Y LA NAVIDAD

El Regalo de la Encarnación

PREPARACIÓN

Se prepara una mesa con un mantel (pedazo de tela) de color morado, una Biblia, un crucifijo, una corona de Adviento y un recipiente con arena. A cada participante se le da una vela apagada.

CANCIÓN DE APERTURA

"O Ven, O Ven, Emmanuel" (*tradicional*)

GUÍA:

Al iniciar este tiempo de oscuridad y expectativa, les invito a relajarse y disfrutar estos breves momentos juntos. (*Hacer una breve pausa*) ¡Demos gracias al Señor, nuestro Dios!

TODOS RESPONDEN:

¡Es nuestro deber dar gracias y alabar a Dios, nuestro Señor!

LECTURA BÍBLICA

Lucas 1:39-45: "María visita a su prima Isabel".

REFLEXIÓN

El guía habla brevemente sobre el regalo de la Encarnación —Dios hecho Hombre y viviendo entre nosotros—, y también sobre el Adviento, que puede ser un tiempo de anticipación y gozo y también un tiempo de ansiedad terrible.

INTERCESIONES

GUÍA:

Señor Jesús, traemos nuestras esperanzas y nuestros temores a este lugar. Danos la fortaleza para trabajar como catequistas al compartir la luz con nuestro prójimo en el trabajo, en la escuela y en nuestros propios hogares. *(La respuesta es: "Ven, Señor Jesús, enséñanos el camino.)*

GUÍA:

Por todos los que se sienten solos en estos días festivos, para que encuentren consuelo y amistad, oremos al Señor.

GUÍA:

Por las familias que se sienten apremiadas en demasiadas direcciones, para que encuentren momentos de paz durante este tiempo sagrado, oremos al Señor.

GUÍA:

Por todos los estudiantes que luchan con sus estudios y compañeros, para que encuentren descanso en este tiempo de gozo, oremos al Señor.

GUÍA:

Por los pobres, para que hagamos el esfuerzo de acercarlos a ellos con alimentos y calor humano por medio de nuestras iglesias y familias, oremos al Señor.

GUÍA:

Por los líderes de nuestra nación, que siempre busquen y demuestren la verdad en todo lo hacen y dicen, oremos al Señor.

(Invitar a los participantes a compartir sus propias intercesiones.)

GUÍA:

Este es un tiempo especial del año. Durante esta época, preparen sus corazones para la venida del Señor. Oremos para estar preparados para todo lo que llegue a pasar. Pidamos a Dios la sabiduría y fortaleza necesaria para ser un buen administrador de todo lo bueno que hemos recibido.

(Permitir un momento de silencio. Luego, invitar a los participantes a encender sus velas y colocarlas en el recipiente de arena).

ORACIÓN

TODOS RESPONDEN:

Dios amoroso, tú nos enviaste a tu Hijo para que nosotros sepamos cuánto nos amas. Ayúdanos a conocer ese amor, especialmente durante esta temporada de anticipación y alegría. Jesús, tú viviste entre nosotros y fuiste como nosotros en todo menos en el pecado. Ayúdanos a seguir tu ejemplo. Espíritu Santo, que animas toda creación con tu bondad y gracia, llena nuestros corazones con amor abundante para todos los que nos rodean. Te pedimos todo esto por Cristo nuestro Señor por el Espíritu Santo. Amén.

CANCIÓN DE CLAUSURA

Cantar "Every Valley" (Dufford, OCP) *o una canción similar.*

SERVICIO DE ORACIÓN PARA CATEQUISTAS PARA EL TIEMPO DE CUARESMA Y PASCUA

El Regalo del Perdón

PREPARACIÓN

Esparcir materiales para escribir (plumas, lápices, papel, sobres y sellos de correo) alrededor de una vela y un crucifijo.

CANCIÓN

Cantar "Hosea" (Gregory Norbet, Benedictine Foundation of the State of Vermont, Inc.) *o una canción más apropiada.*

GUÍA:

En el nombre del Padre, y del Hijo, y del Espíritu Santo.

TODOS RESPONDEN:

Amén.

GUÍA:

Dios amoroso, nos reunimos para reflexionar sobre nuestras vidas durante esté tiempo de Cuaresma/Pascua. Te pedimos que estés con nosotros mientras buscamos la paz que sólo tú nos puedes dar.

LECTURAS BÍBLICAS

Juan 8:1-11: "La mujer que sorprendieron cometiendo adulterio".
Lucas 6:37-38: "No juzgar a otros".

REFLEXIÓN

Pedir a los participantes que se sienten y se pongan cómodos. Cada reflexión puede ser leída por el guía o por los diferentes participantes. Hacer una pausa después de cada una de las reflexiones.

GUÍA:

¿Cuales son los eventos o las circunstancias en mi vida en que puedo hablar sobre las verdades de Dios, pero soy incapaz de vivirlas?

TODOS RESPONDEN:

Señor, otórgame el valor para ir por tu camino.

GUÍA:

¿A quién he criticado recientemente, sintiéndome justificado o no? ¿Qué pasaría si yo me juzgara a mí mismo de la misma manera en que juzgo a los demás?

TODOS RESPONDEN:

Jesús, tú eres compasivo y nos llamas a reflejar esta misma compasión a los demás. Ayúdanos a recordar que tú, sin embargo, siempre nos amas.

GUÍA:

¿Cuándo me he atrevido a compartir los aspectos de mi fe, aun cuando vayan en contra de lo que piensa el mundo?

TODOS RESPONDEN:

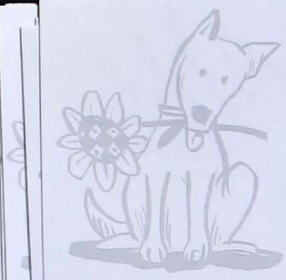
Señor, dame la confianza de compartir tu historia y también la mía con los demás.

GUÍA:

¿A quién sirvo yo? ¿Quiénes son las personas, o cuáles son las opiniones, las posesiones o los roles que controlan mi vida?

TODOS RESPONDEN:

Jesús, ayúdame a darme cuenta de cuáles son los caminos que busco, y de nunca negarme al llamado a la santidad.



GUÍA:

¿Cuándo me he negado a perdonar a los demás, y más bien he perdido el tiempo en pensar solamente en mis propios sentimientos heridos?

TODOS RESPONDEN:

El Señor es amable y misericordioso, lento para enfadarse y rápido para perdonar. Ayúdame a dar el primer paso para reparar una relación que necesita reconciliación.

GUÍA:

La Cuaresma es un tiempo de buscar y brindar el perdón. Los invito ahora a tomar un papel y un sobre de la mesa. Escriban una carta breve a alguien —podría ser a ustedes mismos—, reflexionen como catequistas si necesitan ustedes el perdón o si sienten la necesidad de brindar el perdón a los demás. Ustedes decidan si envían las cartas por correo.

Dar por lo menos cinco minutos para que los participantes escriban la carta. Se puede poner música suave de fondo.

ORACIÓN

TODOS RESPONDEN:

Dios amoroso, me arrepiento de los dioses falsos y vacíos de mi vida. Ayúdame a recordar que tengo necesidad de tu perdón. Concédeme ser como barro en tus tiernas y amorosas manos. Permíteme ser moldeado y transformado por ti. Dame el valor de perdonar cuando mi corazón insista en guardar rencor. Gracias por el precioso regalo del perdón y ayúdame a compartirlo con los demás por medio del ministerio de ser catequista y en todos los aspectos de mi vida. Amén.

CANCIÓN DE CLAUSURA

Cantar "Hosea" (Gregory Norbet, Benedictine Foundation of the State of Vermont, Inc.) *o una canción más apropiada.*

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